The Sign of the Four

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The Sign of the Four

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Summary

“Allow me to introduce you to Irene Isles.”

Sherlock’s hand on the child’s head is all wrong and out of place, mismatching the pride in his tone. He stalls, watching Joan, like he always does after he provides clues and waits for it all to make sense for her. And it does. She notices the familiar shape of the girl’s eyes and nose, a beat slower than Jamie’s smug grin that spells trouble the moment Sherlock introduced the child, but she isn’t like them with the lightning-fast and almost unconsciously take on every detail of their surroundings.

“My daughter.”

When Joan posed the question, it was in the dimness of Jamie's car that stood idling in front of the brownstone. The answer had come in the same even, almost-bored tone and thick accent Joan associates with Jamie. Yet she couldn't stop herself from wondering if this was the outcome Jamie had aimed for since she asked Joan a recount of her previous case and proceeded to fall asleep on her. They didn't have sex then, not the first time it happens, because they have been doing this closer to six months that jetlag and exhaustion and time difference regularly hinders any more exciting activity between them.

It was probably the little huff that Joan did before she left the next day, closer to the afternoon than morning, which gave her away. She won't put it pass Jamie to notice even the smallest detail and runs with it. That, fuelled by Joan's tiredness on doing the walk of shame (and Sherlock turning up his nose after each one) every time Jamie is in town, has come out as *would you like to stay the night?* Jamie's grin was one of a Cheshire cat's and curled smoothly around *of course, darling*.

So there they are, standing on the front door of the brownstone. Jamie's rather big purse that her driver had fetched from the back of the car is probably one of her get-away bags and not one she's prepared to anticipate Joan's request for her to stay over. It's easier for Joan that way—to pretend it's still entirely her decision and not any way of Jamie manipulating the circumstances. Her presence looming behind Joan is distracting enough as it is, not quite touching but painfully present, while Joan fumbles on her keys with a different kind of nervousness.

Sherlock knows, from the very beginning. The letters, the texts, the phone calls, the ambushes. He cycles from straight-up livid to anger to indignant to pleading to brooding. The first time Jamie ventured inside the brownstone to pick Joan up, they had a tense conversation that surprisingly didn't involve any shouting or shooting. Joan is partly grateful and partly mortified, but Sherlock remains on sulking ever since. Jamie staying the night might upset that balance, but he has stated countless time before that the brownstone is her home too and he's also having guests over, so if it turns out to be a disaster she can always excuse Jamie out.

With that assurance in mind, Joan gets them through the door and in the foyer, taking off and hanging up their coats. She is about to call out for Sherlock when a small, blonde child, no older than four, walks out of the library and studies them with bright, inquisitive eyes. She's wearing a white Red Sox jersey that pulls a smile from Joan. She assumes the girl is the child of Sherlock's guest.

Before Joan can engage the girl, Sherlock's quick steps come down the stairs and the child goes to him. "Watson," he greets, then, with clear distaste, "Moriarty."

Jamie doesn't even acknowledge him as she continues to stare at the girl.

Then the wildest thing happens: the girl looks up at him and smiles a toothy grin and he returns the gesture. It's a fleeting thing, but the softness in his eyes is unmistakable and Joan feels an uncomfortable twist in her gut.

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“My daughter.”

Joan blinks. Once, twice. The girl is still there, even though Sherlock’s hand has left the top of her head. “What?” she croaks.

Joan clasps her hand around Jamie’s forearm, suddenly feeling disoriented and needs to anchor herself. It wasn’t too long ago when Agatha came over with a proposition of an heir and Sherlock gave a firm refusal then. Joan recalls everything, because he booked her a suite in the Lutece, where she ran into a recently-freed, now-very-important-asset-of-MI6 Moriarty, just ending her stay in the hotel and was on her way back to London.

“But you—Agatha—“ Joan is confused and somewhat betrayed, because Sherlock always keeps his word, but there has been a child all along. “*What?*”

While Joan sputters, trying to reconcile the new information with the past knowledge and the timeline and the very real little girl in front of her, Jamie simply takes it all in. She knows of the Isles all along—it is her business to know about everything. When she was younger, she attended Professor Isles’ class a couple of times. Their styles are widely different, but knowledge is still power and she does admire every form of arts. *The* Isles in Sherlock’s life is unfortunately not Constance, but her adoptive daughter, Maura Isles—his great many firsts.

(Jamie didn’t make Irene Adler an American, spending precious time to practice the accent, out of whim. She was just glad she didn’t have to dye her hair.)

Jamie looks down at the girl, who resembles Irene—*herself*—more than Kayden Fuller ever did. She is still staring up at Joan with unconcealed interest. Even at such a young age, Sherlock’s child already identified the most important person in the room and Jamie is reminded of her distant foolishness for ever thinking Watson as a mascot.

“It was before—“ Sherlock makes a vague swap on a hand over Jamie and then at himself “—she was born after. Her biological mother and I know each other since we were very young.”

Jamie knows that. What she doesn’t expect is Maura Isles being what Joshua Vikner is to her. Despite being slightly blindsided, she is far too pleased in knowing that she has yet another claw, sinks bone-deep, in Sherlock’s life. He named his child after *her*. Joan’s grip around her arm tightens. A warning. She’s willing to not look to closely on Jamie’s business nowadays, as long as she keeps it away from New York, but she’d not have her ridicule what her game has done to her partner, not if she wanted to continue their relationship and not if she wished to spend the night (and possibly more nights to come) in their home.

Once Jamie inclines her head, Joan thinks they've navigated safely from a landmines disaster. She is, of course, wrong. Another blonde, a woman this time, catches on their murmured conversation from wherever she was in the brownstone and makes her way to them. Irene immediately goes to her as she stands next to Sherlock, not quite touching but far within his rather wide personal space—a familiarity that bears from years of companionship.

Instead of stepping away, Sherlock turns slightly to her, his body open and welcoming. Between the woman's designer dress and expensive heels, it is the wedding ring that Joan notices first. She swears she'd punch him if he somewhat got married in the few hours she left him. Sherlock frowns at the glare directed at himself, but starts the introduction of *doctor Maura Isles*, who smiles even as she corrects him with *I'm not much of a doctor anymore* and Joan likes her, up until Maura turns her full attention to them and hazel eyes light up in recognition and there is her dimple and—

Oh no.

"Jamie?"

Sherlock squints at Maura. The lightest flush on her cheeks, the way her smile widens for a fraction, and the out of place familiarity with the woman who ruined his life. He scowls at Jamie.

"You slept with her," Sherlock accuses.

The landmine is now a nuclear bomb. Joan catches Irene's eyes, wondering if it's a suitable conversation when little ears are present, but the other three adults in the room are too involved with the unexpected unraveling to notice.

Jamie's smirk could have split her face into two. She ignores his murderous glare. "Hello, Doctor Isles," she greets, in a smooth purr of a content cat. "I never have the chance to send my gratitude for your—" she hesitates, as if shy "—assistance. It was very educative, and enjoyable."

Unaware of the actual context, Maura beams. "Sexuality is a spectrum that subjects to change over time. Studies show that female sexuality is more fluid than male's, which could be attributed to our higher erotic plasticity. The female sex drive is socially flexible and responsive." She stares pointedly at Joan's steady hold on Jamie and arrives at the wrong, but plausible, understanding that supports her misconclusion of the situation. "I'm glad I could be of help." Her dimple pops up again. "And that you've come to accept yourself."

Sherlock looks like he wants to scream. "No. No, she is not!"

And that is Joan's cue to get the hell out of there. Dropping her hold on Jamie, she crouches down to introduce herself to Irene, if only to distract the girl from what is going on. Sherlock told Agatha about her before they met; he probably did too with Maura. They can redo their introduction later, if by the end of the night Sherlock wasn't charged for strangling Jamie. Joan's priority is to get Irene away from those two, and to be honest, she has no desire to learn more about their ménage à trois with Maura either. Luckily for her, Irene is still

somewhat entranced by her and willing to go with her without any question. They just make it to the stairs when the yelling commences in earnest.

Some minutes later, Joan is nursing her fresh cup of tea while watching Irene. The girl is standing beside the dining table, eyeing Clyde through the glass of his indoor enclosure. What started out as a simple inquiry on why the name on the back of Irene's jersey is *Rizzoli* instead of *Isles*, has evolved into a long winded one-sided talk.

Joan's brows remain furrowed as she tries to piece together through Irene's not-quite-clear-yet pronunciation on how her Ma is a Rizzoli, so she is too. That she follows up with insisting that Clyde is called *baby Bass*, and that she *knows* Bass is a tor-toise because Mommy taught her, and that Bass was a present from Papa—Joan snorts a laugh that's a tad too hysterical, but here is a small human being who refers to her partner as *Papa*—when Mommy went back to America for school, and that Mommy's roommate, auntie Arizona, helped taking care of him because he was this—she splayed her hand—small.

Irene shows no sign of inheriting Sherlock's sensitivities or Maura's apparent quirkiness. Other than her shining intelligence, she's not much different from other children her age, and that gets Joan thinking about nature versus nurture just as Maura joins them.

"Doctor Watson?"

"Just Joan, please. I'm not much of a doctor anymore either." They share an understanding smile as Joan gets up. "Would you like some tea?"

"Please."

While Joan reheats the kettle on the stove and preparing a new mug on the counter, Maura has taken a seat next to where Irene is standing and is listening to her daughter talking about baby Bass. She gently but firmly corrects her, "We should always refer to everyone by their chosen names and pronouns, or by the one their caretaker chooses for them." Maura says, much to Irene's pouting confusion. "Are you not baby Rizzoli, sweetheart?"

"Yeah!"

And that settles it. Irene abandons her observation to climb on her mother's lap, but not before apologizing to Clyde. Joan can't stop herself from smiling at the little girl, patting her blonde head after she serves Maura her tea and feeling a bit bad that they don't keep any cookies in the brownstone. Irene settles without a fuss, though. The day's excitement catches up with her and soon she is leaning her head on Maura's chest as she rubs her back.

"Sherlock is winning the argument," Maura informs once Irene dozes off.

Joan sighs. She fully expects it to boil down to yet another competition. She's just glad she isn't the one being harassed by those two in their ridiculous rivalry. It's getting tiring to keep reminding them that she can't and won't ever be able to contribute her opinion on that certain comparison because she never sleeps with Sherlock. However, it does intrigue her that Maura doesn't seem to be disturbed in the slightest. Then again, Sherlock did state that they have known each other since they were very young.

“How did you meet Sherlock?” Joan asks.

There is a fond smile on Maura when she answers, “I went to London during one summer break, to see the Rosetta Stone. Sherlock was there first.”

Joan can see it, a much younger version of her partner working the rough translation of the heliographs while muttering to himself. She can see too how Maura would be intrigued by Sherlock and his sheer intelligence.

“We left several strong words at the museum management. They must return the stone back to Egypt.”

And that, too. It brings a grin to Joan’s face. She makes the mistake of assuming the conversation is a mild, pleasant one and takes a sip of her tea.

Maura chooses that exact moment to say, “He is the first person I had coitus with,” like she’s informing Joan of the day’s weather.

The tea strays to the wrong pipe. Joan coughs, clears her throat, and takes her time swallowing and checking that Irene, thankfully, still asleep on Maura’s laps. She thought Sherlock is bad at over-sharing, apparently Maura is worse. She levels her with a deadpanned stare, one that always works with Sherlock and Jamie when they are being intentionally obtuse, but Maura looks genuinely lost. Still, she apologizes.

“No, it’s okay,” Joan says. “I just didn’t expect that.”

“My wife—“ Maura beams. She prefers the term *partner*, because they are equals, but their marital status is still all too new and she’s reveling on being able to refer to Jane as her wife, even though they haven’t gotten the chance to do the ceremony on the cliff of Santorini right above a volcano “—she likes to tease me about this. I can’t lie, either,” she informs, getting slightly flustered. “I get hives when I do.”

Just like Fiona. And that’s when it makes a perfect sense for Joan. That particular knowledge and Irene’s babbling plus the Wikipedia page of Maura Isles that Joan might or might not have read while waiting for the tea earlier.

“You are The Woman,” Joan says, incredulous.

Agatha, Irene, Fiona. The important women in Sherlock’s romantic/sexual life follow one template: his young, probably first love. Maura Isles *is* The Woman. Or at least she should have been, because Joan also knows that a great sexual compatibility doesn’t always translate into anything else. Not even after they created a beautiful child together.

Maura, however, appears to be worried. “Did he say something about me?”

“No, not that.” Joan can’t tell her that she wasn’t even aware of her and Irene’s existences until not an hour ago. “It’s just...he *does* have a type.” She smiles.

It’s obvious that Maura doesn’t quite get what Joan is talking about, but before she can voice out any inquiry for further explanation, Jamie strides in with a too-wide grin, as though she

has won whatever verbal match she had with Sherlock. He follows after her, pouting and looking a bit green.

Knowing what little shit Jamie can be and apparently being the only socially-adapt adult in the house, Joan intercepts her boasting about how Sherlock might have won at Maura, but she has had his partner, repeatedly, through extended period of times, in various positions and places. She is swearing on doing so again before the night end, just as Irene steers from the new commotion and Joan hastily drags Jamie upstairs. At least this way they won't traumatize Irene, no more than whatever else Sherlock has done anyway.

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